THE RUSSIAN SOUL ENGLISHED

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According to received wisdom, the reception of Russian literature in English translation lowered self-consciousness in the use of the term soul *by English authors. Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence provide evidence of an opposite effect. English translations of Russian literature from the 1880s onwards failed to mediate the fact that* душа (*duša*; soul) *had and has a very different place in Russian language and culture than* soul *in English culture. Although not the only factor affecting literary uses of* soul *in early twentieth-century English literature, Russian literature had a significant and enduring impact on its use in English literary production.*

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Bloomsbury and "soul"

In 1945, a London Brains Trust Broadcast located the influence of Russian on English literature primarily in the fact that Russian literature had made it respectable to write about the *soul*. Lovat Dickson, publisher and editor, claimed:

> We owe Russia thanks for the fact that since the great Russian novels thrilled us at the end of the nineteenth century, we have been able in our own novels to talk about the soul without blushing. None of Dickens's or Thackeray's characters ever talked about the soul. The soul became interesting when it was found that it was possible to talk about it decently. (Brewster 187)

Certainly, the 1880s was both the take-off decade for English translations of "the great Russian novels," and the decade in which a group of English politicians and intellectuals were named *The Souls* by Lord Charles Beresford, on the grounds that "You all sit and talk about each others'

souls" (Abdy 10). Yet many English novelists between the 1880s and the end of the Second World War still blushed when using the term *soul*.

Virginia Woolf, foremost amongst enthusiasts for Russian soul during the Bloomsbury-centered Russian craze that reached its height during the First World War, described it not only as "the chief character in Russian fiction," but as a term that the English could not use freely (*Essays 1* 185).

> The gulf between us and them is clearly shown by the difficulty with which we produce even a tolerable imitation of the Russians. We become awkward and self-conscious, or worse, denying our own qualities, we write with an affectation of simplicity and goodness which soon turns to mawkish sentimentality. The truth is that if you say "brother" you must say it with conviction, and it is not easy to say it with conviction. The Russians themselves produce this sense of conviction not because they acquiesce or tolerate indiscriminately or despair, but because they believe so passionately in the existence of the soul. (*Essays 2* 343)

In her own fiction, it is only the characters most likely to read Russian literature who use it. In *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *soul* is used by Peter in relation to Sally Seton, who in Peter's recollection "implored him [...] to save her from the Hughs and the Dalloways and all the other 'perfect gentlemen' who would 'stifle her soul' (she wrote reams of poetry in those days), make a mere hostess of her, encourage her worldliness" (*Three Great Novels* 84). Perhaps these "reams" were influenced by the Russian literature that had appeared in English in the period of her youth. In D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love,* Gerald and Birkin, who are both familiar with Turgenev, are embarrassed when they use the word *soul* (*Women in Love* 202, 206)—while Ursula's grandfather in *The Rainbow*, who expounds a theory of the soul at an 1880s wedding, is not (*Rainbow* 128-29).

Contrary to such inhibitions, many English writers before the 1880s used the term freely. Lovat Dickson's claim that "None of Dickens's or Thackeray's characters ever talked about the soul" is true only if a narrow interpretation is given to "talking about." Both authors' characters

and narrators use the term frequently. Lovat might have chosen a more appropriate example in Jane Austen, who hardly used it at all. George Eliot, who died just before the influx of Russian literature into English translation, used it frequently. Overall, self-consciousness in English authors' use of the term seems to have *increased* between Sally Seton's youth in the 1880s, and her creation in the 1920s. One reason for this was the rise in secularism; another was the increasing association of the term with a nation perceived as strikingly alien by the English: Russia.

That the concept of the Russian soul was central to the reception of Russian literature during the decade in which Woolf, Lawrence, and their contemporaries found their voice, has been much attested. Dorothy Brewster, in her 1954 *East-West Passage: A Study in Literary Relationships*, observed that "Enthusiasm for Dostoevsky and the Russian Soul kindled slowly, but finally blazed up with the publication of the Garnett translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* in 1912" (162).[1] Two years later, Gilbert Phelps, in *The Russian Novel in English Fiction*, described "the Dostoevsky cult" as "the last flare-up of the Romantic decadence" (171), and described "the Russian Soul" as "the natural successor to the Russian Bear" and "the emotions involved" as "equally unbalanced" (13). Donald Davie, in his 1965 *Russian Literature and Modern English Fiction*, attributed particular importance to Maurice Baring's 1910 *Landmarks of Russian Literature* in the British discovery and dissemination of Russian Soul (4). Peter Kaye's 1999 *Dostoevsky and English Modernism 1900-1930* found the period's "earnest interest in that strange nebula called the Russian soul"…"Perhaps the most amusing preoccupation of the age" (20),[2] and Roberta Rubenstein's 2009 *Virginia Woolf and the Russian Point of View* includes several discussions of Woolf's reaction to the Russian soul (85-91 and 154-60).[3]

Although these critics severally note respects in which English responses to the Russian soul were embarrassed or constrained, none concentrates on one important reason for this: that *русская душа* was being received in English translation, with the distortion that inheres in the translation of any concept from Russian to English, and the translation of that especially difficult concept in particular. It is the purpose of this essay to put Woolf and Lawrence's response to the Russian soul in the context of the concept's problematic Englishing.

Lawrence had a similar perception to Woolf's about the relationship of Russians to soul, but he was irritated by this relationship. He found it a soul-characteristic of "these self-divided, gamin-religious Russians who are so absorbedly concerned with their own dirty linen and their

own piebald souls," to *be* thus concerned (*Introductions* 315). Moreover, if the Russians were thus concerned—and if their souls were also non-rational, anti-commercial, patiently suffering, imbued with religious communality, and found at their purest in the unconscious Russian peasant (as Dostoevskii amongst others suggested)—then they were indeed self-divided. This is because the abstraction *the Russian soul* would contain some of the same contradiction involved in the conscious, introspective valorization of unconscious being, of which Lawrence was uncomfortably aware that he might himself be accused. By contrast, Woolf, who never knowingly valorized the unconscious, the anti-intellectual, or the peasant-like, reacted towards the Russian *other* with wonder, admiration, and some envy.

She also had a conscientious sense that she might not be understanding it. She concluded "The Russian Point of View" with the striking qualification: "But the mind takes its bias from the place of its birth, and no doubt, when it strikes upon a literature so alien as the Russian, flies off at a tangent far from the truth" (*Essays 4* 189). This reticence might in part have been due to a sense, which did not apply in the case of the Ancient Greeks (in the understanding of whom Woolf displayed more confidence) that Woolf's points could be contradicted by living Russians. But it was inflected also by her consciousness that she did not read Russian even to the extent that she read Greek. She read Russian literature in a "crude and coarsened version," and was uncertain as to whether the impression of 'simplicity" and "humanity" that Russian literature made upon her was "due to translation or to some more profound cause" (*Essays 4* 182-83).

Lawrence, who like Woolf learned elementary Russian in order to help S.S. Koteliansky with his translations into English, had no such conscientious sense. His cavalier attitude towards natural languages (he rarely bothered to note whose translation of anything he read) fitted with his cavalier attitude to the foreign in general. But the difference of their attitudes was exaggerated by the fact that Woolf found *Russian* literature peculiarly "alien" (amongst other foreign cultures whose literature she read), whereas Lawrence did not.

The present article is predicated upon some of the assumptions of both authors. I attribute no peculiarly unusual or incomprehensible qualities to Russians either in themselves, or as viewed from an English perspective. On the other hand, I share Woolf's sense that the reception of Russian literature, and of the "soul" that was thought to characterize it, was necessarily and profoundly affected by its translation into English. An investigation of how *русская душа* differs from *the Russian soul* will provide some contextualization for the cliché that the latter had

become by the 1920s —and some explanation for the self-consciousness in allusions to it, and to *soul* in any secular context, that was discernible amongst the English then and remains so now. At this point, therefore, it is worth stepping back through the veil of Bloomsbury, into the geographic home of this concept, to investigate what *душа* looked like there.

Душа **and the Russian language**

The association of *русский* with *душа* drew particular support from the prevalent use of *душа* in the Russian language, and the large number of its cognates. Whereas *soul* generates only compound nouns and adjectives (*soulmate*, *soul-shattering*), and has only *spiritual* as its closest adjective, *душа* lends itself to such words and phrases as *душевный* (*sincere/mental*), *равнодушный* (*even-souled, soulless*), *задушевный* (*behind the soul*), *отвести душу* (*to get carried away, e.g. cursing*), and *по душе* (*according with/to the/someone's soul*). *Душа* haunts many Russian idioms unobtrusively. But being what it is, it is never an entirely a dead metaphor—and can jump (Pesmen 7).

Anna Wierzbicka, in her 1992 study *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition*, argues that a word being "at the centre of a whole phraseological cluster" makes it a core concept in a language (16). She takes *душа* as a Russian "key word" (along with *истина* [*truth*], *судьба* [*fate*], *тоска* [*yearning*], *подлец* [*villain*], and *мерзавец* [*bastard*] amongst others) in her investigation of how cultures are revealed by and determinative of language—adopting a position that she traces from Herder via Humboldt to Sapir and Whorf (Wierzbicka, *Semantics* 1-3, 15-16; *Understanding* 3, 198). "A key word such as *duša* (roughly 's*oul*") or *sub"ba* (roughly "*fate*") in Russian is like one loose end which we have managed to find in a tangled ball of wool: by pulling it, we may be able to unravel a whole tangled "ball" of attitudes, values, and expectations" (Wierzbicka, *Semantics* 17).

One person who invested considerable effort in unraveling this "ball" was Dale Pesmen, an American who analyzed the use of the term *душа* by the people of Omsk between 1989 and 1995.[4] According to the book-length account of her findings, *душа* could, but need not, cooperate with Christian thought. It was of positive value, not necessarily of a religious or ethical kind. It could be associated with nature, expanse (dating from eighteenth century pride in the great and ever-increasing size of Russia), profundity, elevation, heart (the part of the body with

which it was most associated), wild generosity and lack of pragmatism (as demonstrated by Raskolnikov giving away his last money to Marmeladov's family in *Crime and Punishment*), holy foolishness (such as that of Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*), miracles, hope, defiance, self-expression, art, music (especially Russian music), gifts, femininity (*душа*, like *Seele*, *l'âme*, and *anima,* being feminine), hyperbole, and inexplicability. It was opposed to *быт* (*everyday life*), hierarchy, the West, modernity, materialism, money, power, the machine, the animal on the one hand and the monster on the other, and Jews (being considered materialist, pragmatist, and having an allegiance to a non-Russian culture) (38-257). Most of Pesmen's analysis fits with nineteenth century literary uses of the term, and Wierzbicka bases her own analysis of *душа* on its use not just in modern Russian, but on nineteenth century literary texts.

Pesmen's list of *душевный* (*soul-ful*) characteristics help to make sense of the last line of Alexander Kuprin's 1894 short story "Славянская Душа" ("slav Soul"). The story concerns a man, Ias′, who was the family servant in the narrator's household during the latter's childhood. He is proud, haughty, devoted to the poor doctor who is his master, and reliable with the exception of the three or so times a year when he disappears to get drunk for a week, after which his master locks him in a shed to recover. He then goes through terrible pangs of remorse, before returning to his normal, extraordinary self. One day he hears that a young nobleman has hanged himself in the toilet of a train a few *versts* away, and asks for permission to go and view the body. He receives this, goes, and on his return disrupts the family's dinner party by guffawing during his account of how terribly swollen the young man's head was. The next day he is observed by the maid watching his face swell in a mirror as he constricts his throat with his hands. That evening he hangs himself in the house's attic. The story ends, almost immediately, with the narrator's reflection: "какая странная душа, —верная, чистая, противоречивая, вздорная и больная, —настоящая славянская душа, жила в Ясином теле!" ("what a strange soul—faithful, pure, contradictory, cantankerous and sick, —a truly Slav soul dwelt in the body of Ias′!") Although there are important differences between the concepts of the Slav and Russian souls (including that the former played a particularly important role in the discourse of Slavophilism, and in Russian interventions in neighboring Slav provinces)— *душа* was employed in largely the same way in both concepts.

It will be apparent that one of the elements of the Russian soul, which can partly be extrapolated from *душа* as employed without qualification, is contradictoriness. Pesmen's list of

qualities associated with *душа* included profundity as well as expanse, and elevation as well as profundity. *Душа* can be considered intrinsic to individuals—particularly to Russians, for whom it is a Traducian inheritence (passed on by parents as a spiritual concomitant of physical reproduction) (Pesmen 165-66). But it can also be a type of behavior, or mode of being in the world, which an individual might at times fulfill and at others not. This mode of soul can involve concealing truth deep inside oneself, or alternatively being unable to express it—but it can also involve being frank and open, even to strangers. Similarly, to speak in a *душевный* matter can involve being tactful to the point of mendacity—or alternatively, being frank, even coarse. The *душа* is non-materialistic, but material luxuries are described as being for the soul (64). Being *образованный*, highly cultured, can be *душевный*—but *душа* is also associated with peasants such as Tolstoi's Platon (in both *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*) who have illiterate *культура* (*culture*). Pain, hard material conditions, and oppression can nourish soul, or alternatively can crush it. One of *душа*'s supposed attributes is *непонятность* (*incomprehensibility*)—but this concept, so strongly associated with profundity, is often superficially defined and discussed. The mode of use of the term *душа* therefore accords with one of its supposed attributes; nevertheless, most attempts to define *душа* fall into contradiction.

"Русская душа" becomes "Russian soul"

The complexities increase when "Russian soul" is received abroad. One reason for the development of a craze for Russian culture in Western Europe in the early twentieth century was the West European perception in Russian soul of a perspective from which troubling or pernicious features of its own civilization could be analyzed and condemned—as Tacitus used Germania in order to criticize the Romans, or as George Eliot used Zionism (in *Daniel Deronda*) as a position from which to criticize a moribund Europe, or as Virginia Woolf felt the temptation to "read[ing] into Greek poetry not what they have but what we lack" (*Essays 4* 48). This was how Dora Black, later Dora Russell (wife of Bertrand Russell) used the Russian soul in her 1921 pamphlet "The Soul and Russia and the Body of America," written during her visit to the Soviet Union:

> The West points to her disorganized railways [...] and urges that the spirit of communism is useless without the industrial body, that first the body must be created, then the soul. Russie assents—she wants the body, but her counterthrust is unanswerable: "You have the body, but where is the soul?" (17)

As the interest in Russian literature grew, literary criticism and books on Russia mediated the reception of that literature. Some of these were by Russians, either written originally in English—like Nadine Jarintzov's—or translated, like many of the contributions by thirty-five Russians to Winifred Stephens's 1916 compendium, *The Soul of Russia*, which was sold to raise money for Russian refugees. But many were by English authors. Woolf commented: "Our estimate of their [the Russian writers'] qualities has been formed by critics who have never read a word of Russian, or seen Russia, or even heard the language spoken by natives" (*Essays 4* 182-83). Nonetheless, in several respects the English and Russian perspectives on Russia and its soul resembled each other. In both countries the concept of *Russian soul* was reached for out of need—in Russia, to defend Russia from a crisis of identity, or inferiority, in relation to Europe; in England, out of a perceived lack of spiritual depth or direction.

Like the concept *tradition*, a national soul is one that is reached for when the supposed signified is threatened, or is of positive use in dealing with an *other*. The Russian preoccupation with Russian exceptionalism, which had been stimulated in the late 1820s by the publication of the philosopher Chaadaev's *Philosophical Letters*, was echoed by English writers, including Virginia Woolf, John Middleton Murry, Hugh Walpole, and Chas Byford (9). The conception of Russia as young, and as having a glorious future ahead of it, had also been a commonplace from Chaadaev onwards, and was largely accepted in England. Melchior de Vogüé, in his highly influential 1886 work *Le roman russe*—which was translated into English when the English were most ready to receive it (at the height of the Russian craze, in 1913) went so far as to call Russia "still in the savage nudity of its youth" (in the translation of H.A. Sawyer) (331). Byford, Harrison and Lethbridge all considered Russia to be young and promising.[5] So too did D.H. Lawrence. In *Women in Love,* the nationality of the character Maxim Libidnikov is repeatedly stressed in connection with his youth. He is nine times referred to by the epithet "the young Russian," despite being in a group of other equally young men (Lawrence, *Women* 69).

Some of the uncertainties about the Russian soul, and conflicting interpretations of it, correspond with uncertainties in English discussions about the nature of Russians. Woolf, noting in 1917 “that extraordinary union of extreme simplicity combined with the utmost subtlety which seems to mark both the educated Russian and the peasant equally”—reproduced Russian discourse of the contradictory nature of their *душа* (*Essays 2* 79). Some writers were uncertain about whether to stress the Russians’ capacity for patient suffering, or their love of freedom; others opted decisively for one or the other. Seton-Watson, lecturer at King’s College London in East European history, stressed Russian opposition to tyranny and defense of small nations (Stephens 292). Lethbridge stressed the Russians’ passivity and suffering (1, 154). Given that these books were published during the period of wartime alliance with Russia, there were obvious strategic reasons for the English to hope for the Russians’ large capacity for suffering, and obedience to their Tsar. In Russia itself, *душа* was employed both in cooperation with, and criticism of, a variety of religious discourses. Accordingly in England the Russian soul was described variously in its relationship to religion; Byford's *The Soul of Russia* was concerned almost exclusively with Christian sects in Russia; Jane Ellen Harrison, in her discussion of the Russian soul in her “Contribution to the Psychology of the Russian People,” hardly mentioned religion at all.

In England as in Russia, there was a difference of opinion over how far to extol or disparage the Russian soul. A sudden enthusiasm for a signifier does not necessarily imply enthusiasm for its signified. Byford seems to have appropriated *The Soul of Russia* as the title for his book in order to sound a note of skepticism as to the wisdom and strength of that soul, and criticized from a rationalist standpoint what he described as Russia’s superstitiousness, widespread ignorance of Christian doctrine, and preference for garish, glittering churches (23, 32, 390). He argued —as Westernizers in Russia also argued—that Russia needed more contact with the West, which would develop her soul, and allow her to be a beacon to other nations (Byford 27, 61-62). Harrison argued in her pamphlet on the Russian verb that a combination of both Eastern and Western virtues—Russian soul and Western technology—were needed to defeat the Germans who, as she did not admit, had done so much to develop both the concept of the national soul and technology (12).

The Russian Revolution did something to dampen English fervor for the Russian soul, and demanded some modification of its conception—but less so than would have been the case

were that soul not already understood as on the one hand intrinsically contradictory, and on the other as having elements that were eternal. Woolf in 1918 considered that what connected Militsina and Saltikov (the two authors of different centuries whom she was reviewing) was that "the unity which we feel in both writers lies deeper [...] it will outlive a change of government; roughly stated, it seems to consist in their sense of brotherhood" (*Essays 2* 341).

However, despite these correspondences between Russian and English understandings of the Russian soul, in certain respects English discourse differed from its Russian counterpart. Inevitably it had some of the privileges and limitations of an external perspective. When Woolf commented on a scene from Serge Aksakoff's boyhood memoir—"The shouts of joy and the love of watching both seem the peculiar property of the Russian people" (*Essays 2* 182)—she made an observation of a kind not made by Russians themselves. Yet, as she wrote in "The Russian Point of View," "A special acuteness and detachment, a sharp angle of vision the foreigner will often achieve; but not that absence of self-consciousness, that ease and fellowship and sense of common values which make for intimacy, and sanity, and the quick give and take of familiar intercourse" (*Essays 4* 182).

Seen from outside, the Russian soul was an entity about which sufficiently little was known that English writers felt that they could tackle it in a single volume, whereas in Russia *русская душа* was such a pervasive concept that fewer people undertook to describe it in a single volume. This—in addition to Soviet government's disapproval of the concept of *душа* for its metaphysical dimension—explains the fact that in the 1910s and 20s more books were written about *Russian soul* than about *русская душа*. The particularity of the English external perspective on Russia may be measured against that of a Frenchman. De Vogüé stressed the similarities of English and Russian fiction, and of the English and Russian *âmes*—both of which he classified as Northern. Their realism tended to include the spiritual in the real. He pointed to the causal connection between the two—that Russian realism "owes much to Dickens [and Eliot and Thackeray] and but little to Balzac" or Flaubert (17). These points were less apparent to the English, whose sense of similarity with the Russians was overwhelmed by a sense of difference.

"Русская душа" in translation

The terms *soul* and *spirit* are frequently used in descriptions of what takes place during translation. On the one hand, the *soul* of a word can be thought of as precisely that which survives translation, by metempsychosis from the body of one word into that of another language's—or else the writer's (or source text's) soul can be considered to temporarily haunt the ideal translator. (A.F. Tytler, Lord Woodhouselee, argued in 1797 that the translator should "adopt the very soul of his author, which must speak through his own organs" [203].) On the other hand, the soul of an author, word, text or language can be considered to be precisely that which constitutes the most profound part of its quiddity, and as that part of it which is least translatable. De Maistre argues that the "unité morale" of a nation's "âme générale" is 'surtout annoncée par la langue" (the *"moral unity"* of a nation's *"collective soul"* is *"primarily declared by its language"*) (206), and translator Constance Garnett argues that "The language of a country is the soul of its people" (qtd. in Weissbort 293). These usages simultaneously acknowledge, and mask, the fact that "soul" and its equivalents in other languages are peculiarly difficult to translate.

Translation of the term *душа* into English had particular implications connected to the facts that *soul* was used very little in comparison to *душа*. In England, one is more apt to talk about national *character* than soul. There are no twentieth century books with "English soul" in this titles, but several with "English Character" in their titles (at least one each from 1909, 1912, 1926, 1928, 1938, 1952, 1955, 1990, 2006 and 2009). But precisely because *soul* is relatively foreign to modern English, it is appropriate to translate *русская душа* as *Russian soul*; such a translation is source-language biased, and exoticizing. English self-consciousness in the use of the term *soul* was indicated by the occasional use of inverted commas or capitals—Byford uses both. Stephen and Rosa Graham give their selection of their translations of Kuprin's short stories the title *"A Slav Soul" and Other Stories*, whereas Kuprin himself had never made "Славянская душа" the title story of any of his collections. Wierzbicka's comparative study of the uses of *soul* and *душа* in their respective languages draws on word counts such as Zasorina's (1977) and Steinfeldt's (1974). "According to Zasorina's data," she writes, "the word *duša* [*душа*] occurs as many as 377 times in a corpus based on one million words of running text, and if we add to this the occurrences of the adjective *dusevnyj* and the adverb *dusevno*, the figure rises to 450. According to Kucera and Francis (1967), the corresponding figure for the English *soul* is 73" (Wierzbicka, *Semantics* 34).[6] "The high frequency and the wide scope of use of the Russian *duša*

distinguish it not only from the English *soul* but also from its closest lexical equivalents in other European languages, in particular from the French *âme* and from the German *Seele*. In fact, one could probably arrange European languages on a scale, with Russian and English at the opposite ends and with French and German in between" (Wierzbicka, *Semantics* 31, 33). *Spirit* and "*dukh*":

> appear to be equally strong in both cultures [...] But whereas in Russian the corresponding figure for *duša* is twice as high [...], in English the figure for *soul* is three and a half times lower than that for *spirit* [...] This is consistent with the intuitive impression that in the modern Anglo-Saxon world the concept of spirit plays a greater role than that of soul (whereas in Russian culture, *duša* is even more important than *dux*). (Wierzbicka, *Semantics* 446)

One implication, as Woolf noticed, is that "English prose doesn't seem to tolerate as many references to people's souls as typical Russian prose would"; where it is retained it "gives the English prose a slightly odd flavour" (Wierzbicka, *Semantics* 31). When, at the end of *Anna Karenina*, Levin has an epiphany because he is told that Platon "lives for his soul," the novel's many previous uses of the term *душа* are retrospectively elevated out of unobtrusive cliché. There are other differences of meaning. People can know and reveal to others their *душа* more than they can their *soul* or *Seele*. Wierzbicka notes that in Ernst Strenge's 1885 translation of *Война и мир* (*War and Peace*) as *Krieg und Frieden* (the earliest German translation of the novel) no more than half of the instances of *душа* are translated as *Seele*, in part because the former but not the latter can experience moods (*Semantics* 55).

There are grammatical complexities in translating *душа* as *soul*. English is incapable of attributing a gender to *soul*. It is neutered on entering English, and forms no feminine counterpart to spirit (as *душа* does to *дух*). Its feminine associations are therefore lost in translation. On the other hand, English has articles. We frequently attribute to Russian soul the definite article, whereas Russians think only of *русская душа*. The definite and zero articles when applied to *soul* give a sense of a collective or common entity ("to hear twigs cracking, and feel hooves planted down in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest, the soul"), as opposed to that

individuation which is stressed by *a* soul, or a personal pronoun, *my* soul (*Three Great Novels* 15). In Dostoevskii's *Записки из подполья* [*Notes from Underground*], "Но я уже был деспот в душе" ("But I was already a tyrant in soul") could be rendered as "But I was already a tyrant *at* soul", but otherwise it demands the interposition of an article for translation into idiomatic English—possibly the personal pronoun *my*, which individuates the soul, whereas Russian does not make this distinction (324-422).

Indeed, Woolf noted that *душа* was a socially homogenizing phenomenon. Whereas in English fiction "society is sorted out into lower, middle, and upper classes, each with its own traditions, its own manners, and, to some extent, its own language," to Dostoevskii "It is all the same [...] whether you are noble or simple, a tramp or a great lady [...] The soul is not restrained by barriers. It overflows, it floods, it mingles with the souls of others" (*Essays* 4 187). On the one hand, this makes the Russian soul feel foreign to Woolf. On the other, since its essence is brotherhood, Russian soul (that is, what Russians are peculiarly able to describe as being the human soul) is precisely what we all have in common. Woolf wrote in a 1918 review that "that living core which suffers and toils is what we all have in common. We tend to disguise or to decorate it; but the Russians believe in it, seek it out, interpret it, and, following its agonies and intricacies, have produced not only the most spiritual of modern books but also the most profound" (*Essays 1* 343).

Just as there was a reciprocal effect on meaning between *русская* and *душа*, so *Russian soul* (which could mean the Russian collective soul, *soul* as conceived by the Russians, and soul as a particular characteristic of the Russians) affected the meanings of both the adjective and the noun. For writers such as Woolf, *soul* acquired a Russian flavor. "Turning to the pages of Elena Militsina and Mikhail Saltikov in the belief that we have met the word over and over again, we do not, as a matter of fact, find a single example of it. We have found it in the atmosphere, then; it is the word which expresses, not only the attitude of the characters to each other, but the writer's attitude towards the world" (*Essays 1* 341).

Circularity between conception of the Russian soul, and interpretation of Russian situations, operates in her response to Chekhov's story *Степь* (*Steppe*), wherein the Russian landscape, the Russians travelling across it, and the Russian soul, become mutually determinative: "as the travellers move slowly over the immense space, now stopping at an inn, now overtaking some shepherd or waggon, it seems to be the journey of the Russian soul, and

the empty space, so sad and so passionate, becomes the background of his thought" (*Essays 3* 85). Indeed, a similar feedback mechanism had taken place in Russia itself, as Russians became aware of the reception of the terms *russische Seele*/*âme russe*/*Russian soul* in the Europe against which it was to a large extent defined. Both positive (Bloomsbury English) and critical responses were liable to reinforce the pride in the term of those Russians who employed the concept.[7]

But the translation of adjectives formed from the names of nations involves its own problems—first, because the adjective *русский* (*Russian*) has a self-referential relationship to the Russian language, as the noun *душа* does not, and secondly, because *русский* has a partner-adjective (*российский*, which is less ethnically determinate), which English does not have. Pavel Plavilshchikov's "Нечто о врожденном свойстве душ российских" (literally, "something on the innate qualities of the souls of the people of the Russian lands") is translated by Orlando Figes as *On the Innate Qualities of the Russian Soul*. The singular noun *Soul* was avoidable, but a more accurate designation of peoples of whatever ethnicity who live in the Russian Empire (as opposed to ethnic Russians) could have been achieved only at the expense of considerable clumsiness (Figes 314).

Edwardian and Georgian writers who knew Russian tried to make English readers aware of such points. Jane Harrison, in *Russia and the Russian Verb* (1915), argued that both *душа* and linguistic structures were used unconsciously, were connected, and that the latter was revelatory of the former. In particular, she understood the Russian emphasis on aspect at the expense of tense as *душевный*: "Reason has little use for the imperfective, but emotion, sympathy, hungers after it"; Russian "is weak in tenses because the time-interest is not in the first plan. Russia lives *sub specie aeternatatis*" (Harrison 9). This, she argued, determined how one should read Dostoevskii, who does not condemn his characters, because he is still living the action, understanding it through feeling; accordingly, we should not *think about*, but *live*, Russian novels (Harrison 10).

One year later a Russian living in England, Nadine Jarintsov performed a similar exercise in *The Russians and their Language*, although she stressed words and phrases over grammar, and had an index composed of the Russian words to which she referred. Prefiguring Pesmen and Wierzbicka, she pointed out how many words were related to *душа* and *дух*—breath, spirit, ghosts, perfumes, air, to strangle, rest, and unanimity (Jarintsov 37). Similarly, De Vogüé had pointed out that "The soul has altogether a prominent place in a Russian conversation," and the

something that suits is “po dushe” (38). However, such explanations could only go so far to mediate *душа* to the non-Russophones; as Pesmen testifies, an accurate sense of the role of *душа* in the Russian language can take a foreigner years to acquire.

Constance Garnett—the first major English translator of Russian prose—is faithful in translating *душа* as soul. The same is true of Louise and Aylmer Maude. Very occasionally, Garnett uses it where it is not in the original. In her translation of *Записки из подполья* [*Notes from Underground*] she gives “I had at one time spent some rather soulful moments with him” as a translation of “У меня с ним бывали когда-то довольно *светлые минуты*” (“sometime I spent some rather luminous moments with him”) (367-68). But in general there are perforce far fewer *soul* words than *душ-* related worlds, as befits the two languages. Soul can always be translated as *душа*, whereas the reverse is not always true (Wierzbicka, *Semantics* 39). Robert Lord argued in 1970 that since *душа* has a greater range of application than *soul*, Garnett should often have used heart instead of soul (1). In fact she sometimes does so. In the same work she translates “Но я уже был деспот в душе” (“But I was already a tyrant in my soul”) as “But I was already a tyrant at heart” (*7*: 374). Clearly, Lord thinks that she should have done this more often, and that had she done so, Woolf, for example, would not have been so obsessed by “the soul” as “the chief character in Russian fiction” (*Essays 4* 185).

Literature and “soul”

Another factor influencing the English reception of *русская душа* was that it was encountered largely through literature. This was in one sense appropriate, artistic self-expression being one of the attributes of *душевность*; Belinskii remarked on Gogol’s Russian soul, and Dostoevskii on Pushkin’s. However, since the Russian soul was conveyed to the English primarily through literature, its chief carrier was not the peasant himself, but the verbal artist who gave him literary form. This artist was by definition literate, and therefore that much closer to resembling the *literati* amongst whom the Russian craze was a phenomenon. English readers of Russian literature were not also surrounded by the use of the term *душа* and its cognates in extra-artistic speech, and almost all of the Russians whom they knew were authors or their characters. To be coarse and soulful, as Kuprin’s Ias′ is, it is still a coarseness mediated by art; so too is *душевный* inarticulacy of a strongly mediated kind in verbal art.

A good example of the English understanding of Russian writers as metonymic of their culture is in Maurice Baring's 1914 *Outline of Russian Literature*, in which he wrote that Tolstoy and Dostoevskii "between them [...] sum up in themselves the whole of the Russian soul [...] If you take as ingredients Peter the Great, Dostoevsky's Myshkin—the idiot, the pure fool who is wiser than the wise—and the hero of Gogol's Revisor—Hlestyakov the Liar and windbag, [...] you can, I think, out of these elements, reconstitute any Russian who has ever lived" (91). He goes on to give various proportions which will produce historical and fictional Russians, before concluding: "Mix all the elements equally, and you get Onegin, the average man" (92).

Woolf implicitly acknowledges the mediatory role of the writer, in saying that in Dostoevskii's stories (*The Gambler*, "Poor People," "The Landlady"), "people met in the streets, porters, cabmen—who wander in and begin to talk and reveal their souls, not that they are wanted, but because Dostoevsky knows all about them and is too tired to keep them to himself" (*Essays 2* 166). Having said this, literature was not all that was available to the English in translation. Woolf noted in her review of "A Russian Schoolboy" (translated by J.D. Duff) that the author Serge Aksakoff experienced "fits and ecstasies" as a schoolboy. These remind the reader "of many similar scenes which are charged against Dostoevsky as a fault. The fault, if it is a fault, appears to be more in the Russian nature than in the novelist's version of it. *From the evidence supplied by Aksakoff* we realize how little discipline enters into their education" (*Essays 2* 181-82).

However, the connection between art and the soul was less strengthened than it might have been by the reception of Russian literature, for two reasons. First (assuming that poetry is more representative of art than prose) it was largely prose, not poetry, which was being translated. Woolf wrote of a passage of Greek verse from the *Agamemnon*: "The meaning is just on the far side of language. It is the meaning which in moments of astonishing excitement and stress we perceive in our minds without words; it is the meaning that Dostoevsky (hampered as he was by prose and as we are by translation) leads us to by some astonishing run up the scale of emotions and points at but cannot indicate; the meaning that Shakespeare succeeds in snaring" (*Essays 4* 45). By implication, prose limits one to what is more translatable. Second, some English defined Russian literature as outside the boundaries of art, and as partaking of life itself. Charles Gray Shaw, for example, wrote in 1918 that

> the reader cannot comprehend Dostoievsky as artist unless the reader is prepared to look upon art as absolute. Style is swallowed up in significance, technique surrenders to subject; for the story *is* something, not about something. As architecture and music are arts which refuse to represent something other than themselves, but are real and representative together, so the art of Dostoievsky, instead of being pictorial and imitative, is so much reality spread out before one's gaze. (246-47)

Two years earlier, John Middleton Murry had taken this argument further in his book on Dostoevskii: "It would be foolish for an English writer to attempt a purely literary criticism of Dostoevsky's work; this book also professes only to think of what may be for us prophetic in it"; "the novels of this great novelist have in them explosive force enough to shatter the very definition of the novel" (v, 36-37, 25). In fact, so radical is his manipulation of time that he "does not write novels" at all (Murry 28). Similarly, his letters are "not letters at all" (Murry 56).

One explanation for what Murry suggests is the formlessness of Russian literature would be Russian soul. For Woolf *soul* not only has "little sense of humour and no sense of comedy" but also

> It is formless. It has slight connection with the intellect. It is confused, diffuse, tumultuous, incapable, it seems, of submitting to the control of logic or the discipline of poetry. The novels of Dostoevsky are seething whirlpools, gyrating sandstorms, waterspouts which hiss and boil and suck us in. They are composed purely and wholly of the stuff of the soul. (*Essays 4* 186)

This naturally limits the degree to which it can be accessed by critical categories such as Woolf felt herself to possess.

And yet two years later she seemed to take the reverse view**:** that the Russians, not the English, create novels as works of art. "In England, at any rate," she writes, "the novel is not a work of art. There are none to be stood beside *War and Peace*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, or *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* [...] In France and Russia they take fiction seriously. [...] Tolstoy writes *War and Peace* seven times over." The English writer might imitate them, "But then the

story might wobble; the plot might crumble; [...] The novel in short might become a work of art" (*Essays 4* 602). It seems that she had revised her conception of the novel partly in relation to the Russian novel. For the Russians, literature was one manifestation of *душа*; for the English, such manifestations altered literature's very definition.[8] The English concept *soul* was similarly altered by its use as the translation of *душа*.

Lawrence was far less concerned with artistry and form than Woolf was—and far less diffident about using the term *soul* in his literary criticism.[9] The soul was for Woolf *a* unit of interpretation suggested by Russian texts—not the fundamental unit of interpretation to be applied to all texts. When writing on George Eliot, for example, she did not mention soul; nor did she in relation to Defoe, Austen, the Brontës, Hardy or Conrad. She did when writing about Donne and Montaigne, but only in quotation.

Lawrence used the word *soul* more often as a term of analysis than as its object, and applied it to writing about all other authors, irrespective of whether or not they used it themselves. He used his literary criticism not only in order to apply, but to develop his monist theory of the nature of the soul. Yet the literature in relation to which he chose to do this the most was American: in *Studies in Classic American Literature* he referred to *soul* over a hundred times, but in *Study of Thomas Hardy* only thirty-nine times.[10] As Dorothy Brewster noted, "There was no such excitement among intellectuals in the United States of the Russian Soul, as among the English"; "Americans had no need of the Russians to teach them how to talk of the soul without blushing; they had had Emerson; even the Russians had not had the Over-Soul" (188). Lawrence was quick to perceive this connection. He wrote in his Foreword to the volume that:

> Two bodies of literature seem to contain a quick from which the future may develop: the Russian and the American. [...] The *classic* Americans, if you please. [...] And on a par too, with those voluminous Russians. Poor thin volumes of Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Poe, against the piles of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy and Turgenev! Oh don't trouble. The one lot is as weighty as the other, if the scales be true. Certainly the Americans are less explicit: all implicit, only implicit. Which is just the contrary with the Russians:

> they are too explicit. The Russian hates the *implied* – as we all do, at last, But better a deep reality implied, than triviality explicit. Not that the Russians are trivial: indeed no. (*Introductions* 389-90)

Clearly, Lawrence here was deliberately wrenching the attention of the English public towards the possibility of *American* soul, which he described in terms as different as possible from those in which the Russian soul was stereotyped: “The essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer” (*Introductions* 19, 65). *Soul*, he argued, did not belong to the Russians alone. Lawrence’s characterization of “the American whole soul” differed from that of any American—but not because *soul* in America differed as much in meaning from *soul* in England as does *душа* (*Introductions* 19). Arguably, the modern understanding of *soul* in England is more greatly influenced by its translation of *душа*, than by its use in any other Anglophone context.

In 1930 a *Times Literary Supplement* article “Dostoevsky and the Novel” summed up Russian influence on European and English fiction:

> The agitation of mind and spirit which the Russian novel expressed seemed suddenly to communicate itself to novelists in other countries; the infection spread until, in one or other of its various forms, the problem of representing the soul, reality, the intangible world—one name serves as well or ill as another—became an obsession with the European novelist. (Brewster 186)

These words do not serve as well or ill as each other, precisely because *soul* was altered as the others were not. The reception of Russian literature in translation was not the only reason for the estrangement of the term from common usage in twentieth century English—secularization, materialism, Marxism and psychoanalysis also played parts. However, its ongoing association, in an ill-translated cliché, with a country “so alien as” Russia was and is perceived to be, is not without importance (*Essays 4* 189).

Notes

[1] For Brewster's discussion of "The Russian Soul," see 161-72. For her discussion of "The Partial Eclipse of the Russian Soul" as a British reaction to the Russian Revolution, see 176-94. As she notes, what V.S. Pritchett in 1942 called "The once notorious Russian Soul," became, "*more modestly, the soul*" (185).

[2] Kaye discusses in particular a passage in *The Years* in which Nicholas Pomjalovsky tries to describe the soul: "The key word, 'soul,' along with the entire dialogue, has prompted several Woolf scholars to draw connections to different Russian writers"; "the divergent scholarly views suggest that Nicholas Pomjalovsky's uncertain background and the word 'soul' prompt associations with several of the Russian writers whom Woolf admired" (154).

[3] Rubenstein notes the connections between Woolf's reviews of and essays on Russian literature, and her own creative practice: "It is fair to say that she would have become a very different writer—and perhaps not a pioneer and central figure in British Modernism—if she had not been profoundly influenced by her extended and many-layered immersion in Russian literature" (162). The book's appendixes include transcriptions of Woolf's reading notes on Russian literature, and her unpublished essay on rereading Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" in the light of Russian literature ("Tchekov on Pope", Appendix B, 175-186).

[4] This book, along with Anna Wierzbicka's *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition: Universal Human Concepts in Culture-specific Configurations* (1992), belonged to a period of resurgence of interest in the Russian soul, as is apparent from the Select Bibliography. This was a time when the Soviet power which had disapproved of the term's theological associations had disappeared, Gorbachev had started using the term more, Russians were looking to their pre-Soviet past for a basis of identity, the need for a non-materialist idealism grew inside Russia, and interest in what might be the resurgent or enduring characteristics of the Russians was awakened outside of Russia.

[5] Byford writes, "No race has had a more tragic past, and no race seems destined to a more brilliant future" (13). Harrison says, "she is young among nations" (11). Lethbridge notes, "for long enough Russia has been the pupil of Western Europe. She has outgrown that phase" (79).

[6] In *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition,* Wierzbicka also notes that Russian uses *dusa* more often than *telo* (body), whereas the English use *body* four times as much as soul (34).

[7] A history of the concept *русская душа* is given in Williams. The apposition of the national adjective to *душа* originally indicated the highest common factor of those souls which belonged to Russians. During the nineteenth century, however, the noun phrase *русская душа* evolved to denote a communal soul of which a whole people partook. This concept itself was affected by the reception of European thinkers including Rousseau, Carlyle, Joseph de Maistre, Herder, Schiller, Humboldt, Schleiermacher, and Schelling. Just as the German philosophers' uses of the terms *Geist* and *Seele* modified those terms' meanings in German, their translation into Russian affected the meanings of the terms *дух* and *душа*.

[8] For a discussion of Woolf's complex response to Dostoevsky, see Kaye 66- 95.For a discussion of her conception of Russian literature as formless, see Rubenstein 85-90.

[9] For a discussion of Lawrence's combative response to Dostoevsky, see Kaye 29-65.

[10] Woolf, by contrast, found that "American literature [...] is either feeble with an excess of culture, or forcible with a self-conscious virility" (*Essays 3* 86).

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